

Message Text

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DIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 02611

USSALTTWO

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR
SUBJECT: SOVIET LEADERSHIP: NEW BREZHNEV AWARD AND FURTHER
APPEARANCES; SHCHERBITSKIY'S 60TH BIRTHDAY AND OTHER
HAPPENINGS

SUMMARY. FEBRUARY 20 WAS A BIG DAY FOR BREZHNEV: IN THE
MORNING HE RECEIVED THE SOVIET UNION'S HIGHEST MILITARY
AWARD AND DELIVERED A SHORT SPEECH OF THANKS; IN THE
AFTERNOON HE BRAVED COLD, WINDY WEATHER TO ESCORT SYRIAN
PRESIDENT ASSAD THROUGH THE FULL AIRPORT ARRIVAL CEREMONY.
BREZHNEV'S BRIEF REFERENCE TO DETENTE IN HIS THANK-YOU
SPEECH WAS RELATIVELY PESSIMISTIC (SEPTTEL). TV COVERAGE
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OF THESE EVENTS SHOWED BREZHNEV TO BE IN REASONABLY GOOD
FORM. BREZHNEV ALSO SEEMED FIT IN HIS FEBRUARY 15 MEETING
WITH JALLUD AND HIS FEBRUARY 17 MEETING WITH YUGOSLAV
AMBASSADOR SMOLE. OFFICIAL COMMEMORATION OF SHCHERBIT-
SKIY'S 60TH BIRTHDAY WAS ABOUT WHAT ONE WOULD HAVE
EXPECTED FOR A PARTY OFFICIAL OF HIS RANK, BUT NO MORE.
ROMANOV'S HEADING A SOVIET DELEGATION TO VIETNAM MAY

ENHANCE HIS IMAGE AS AN ALL-AROUND LEADER, BUT ONLY ONE, LOW-RANKING MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP TURNED OUT FOR ROMANOV'S DEPARTURE FROM MOSCOW. END SUMMARY.

1. BREZHNEV'S BIG DAY. BREZHNEV RECEIVED THE SOVIET UNION'S HIGHEST MILITARY AWARD, THE DIAMOND ENCRUSTED "THE ORDER OF VICTORY," IN A PREVIOUSLY UNANNOUNCED KREMLIN AWARD CEREMONY THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 20 (SOVIET RADIO CARRIED THE SPEECHES, READ BY AN ANNOUNCER, AT NOON THAT DAY). THIS UNUSUAL AWARD SEEMS TO CULMINATE THE MILITARY FACET OF THE "CULT OF BREZHNEV" WHICH GOT UNDER WAY WHEN LEONID IL'ICH BECAME MARSHAL OF THE SOVIET UNION IN OCTOBER OF 1976. AS ONE SOVIET SOURCE NOTED TO US, THE ONLY THING LEFT TO BE GIVEN BREZHNEV IS THE TITLE OF "GENERALISSIMUS," THUS FAR ASSOCIATED ONLY WITH STALIN AND CHIANG KAI-SHEK.

2. SEVERAL ASPECTS OF THIS AWARD SEEM NOTEWORTHY:

--ACCORDING TO THE 1971 EDITION OF THE "OFFICERS HANDBOOK," THE ORDER OF VICTORY "IS AWARDED TO SENIOR COMMAND PERSONNEL OF THE SOVIET ARMY FOR THE SUCCESSFUL CONDUCT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THE SCALE OF SEVERAL FRONTS OR ONE FRONT, AS A RESULT OF WHICH THE SITUATION IS BASICALLY CHANGED IN FAVOR OF THE SOVIET ARMY";

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--THESE CRITERIA OBVIOUSLY HAD TO BE MODIFIED FOR BREZHNEV, APPARENTLY ON THE OCCASION OF THE UPCOMING 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES (FEBRUARY 23), AND THUS THE SUPREME SOVIET DECREE ON THE AWARD CITES HIS "LARGE CONTRIBUTION" TO WORLD WAR TWO VICTORY BUT ALSO CITES HIS EFFORTS TOWARDS STRENGTHENING THE USSR'S "DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY" AND FORMULATING AS WELL AS CARRYING OUT SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY;

--PERHAPS THE MOST UNUSUAL ASPECT OF THIS AWARD IS THAT BREZHNEV IS ITS FIRST RECIPIENT SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO; WE UNDERSTAND THAT ONLY 19 "ORDERS OF VICTORY" HAD BEEN AWARDED, OF WHICH FIVE WENT TO FOREIGNERS (INCLUDING EISENHOWER, MONTGOMERY, AND TITO); STALIN, ZHUKOV AND VASIL'YEVSKIY RECEIVED TWO EACH;

--THE DECREE LISTS BREZHNEV'S TITLE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR DEFENSE COUNCIL, BUT DOES NOT CREDIT HIM WITH THE TITLE OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF (AS DID AN ARTICLE BY COLONEL GENERAL SREDIN IN THE OCTOBER 1977 ISSUE OF "VOYENNIY VESTNIK");

--AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT FROM THE NATURE OF THE AWARD, BREZHNEV'S THANK-YOU SPEECH WAS CAST IN TERMS PLEASING TO THE MILITARY; HE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE COUNTRY'S DEFENSE "AT THE NECESSARY LEVEL", AND IN MENTIONING DETENTE USED THE UNUSUAL FORMULATION "IF DETENTE WILL CONTINUE, IF OTHER STATES WILL BE PREPARED FOR DISARMAMENT";

--NONETHELESS, THAT THE COUNTRY'S HIGHEST MILITARY AWARD WAS GIVEN TO A MAN WHO DID NOT COMMAND SOVIET TROOPS DURING THE WAR MUST HAVE CAUSED AT LEAST SOME RESENTMENT WITHIN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, IN PARTICULAR THE

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LAST OF THE SURVIVING "OLD WAR HORSES" LIKE MARSHAL CHUYKOV (WHO COMMANDED THE 62ND ARMY DURING THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD) AND MARSHAL MOSKALENKO.

4. SUSLOV DELIVERED THE AWARD SPEECH WITH REMARKABLE VIGOR AND CLARITY FOR A MAN OF 75 WHO IS REPUTED TO BE IN POOR HEALTH. AS SEEN ON TV, BREZHNEV'S APPEARANCE AND MOVEMENTS SEEMED NORMAL. WE WOULD RATE HIS PERFORMANCE IN READING A BRIEF THANK-YOU SPEECH AS ABOUT AVERAGE FOR HIM:

--HE READ SLOWLY (IT TOOK HIM JUST OVER SIX MINUTES,
WHEREAS THE SAME TEXT WAS READ AT NORMAL SPEED
ON SOVIET RADIO IN JUST OVER FOUR MINUTES) AND IN
SEVERAL INSTANCES MOMENTARILY LOST HIS PLACE;
--HE HAD SOME DIFFICULTY IN HOLDING THE PAGES STEADY
IN HIS LEFT HAND (A PODIUM WAS NOT PROVIDED);
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--HE SLURRED BADLY IN ONE OR TWO PLACES;
--BUT HE GOT THROUGH THE SPEECH WITH NO EMBARRASSING
FLUFFS, IN HIS FIRST PUBLIC SPEAKING TEST SINCE HIS
RETURN TO THE PUBLIC EYE JANUARY 31.

5. ON THE LEADERSHIP SIDE, SEVERAL ASPECTS OF THE AWARD
CEREMONY WERE INTERESTING:

--BY PRESENTING THE AWARD, SENIOR CPSU IDEOLOGUE, WHO
REPORTEDLY WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN INSTALLING BREZHNEV
AS CPSU FIRST SECRETARY IN OCTOBER 1964, CONTINUES
TO PLAY SOMETHING OF THE PATRON'S ROLE IN CONFERRING
NEW HONORS ON LEONID IL'ICH (THE LAST MAJOR HONOR
CONFERRED UPON BREZHNEV BY SUSLOV WAS THE TITLE OF
CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET PRESIDUM);

--BREZHNEV AND SUSLOV LED THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP INTO
THE HALL, THEN CAME KIRILENKO, FOLLOWED BY KULAKOV
AND USTINOV;

--ANDROPOV TURNED UP FOR THE EVENT, HIS FIRST PUBLIC
APPEARANCE SINCE MID-DECEMBER; GROMYKO WAS ABSENT (AND
THE YUGOSLAV EMBASSY REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN INFORMED HE
IS SICK); SOME SENIOR LEADERS BASED OUT OF MOSCOW
ATTENDED (KUNAYEV, ALIYEV), OTHERS DID NOT (SHCHERBIT-
SKIY, MASHEROV, RASHIDOV).

6. IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE AT THIS POINT TO RECOUNT ONE
OF THE LATEST BREZHNEV JOKES: DURING THE WAR MARSHAL
ZHUKOV OUTLINES A COMPLICATED MILITARY STRATEGY TO
STALIN; STALIN REPLIES "IT LOOKS ALRIGHT TO ME, COMRADE
MARSHAL, BUT OF COURSE I'LL HAVE TO CHECK IT OUT WITH
COLONEL BREZHNEV."

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7. THE SECOND MAJOR EVENT ON FEBRUARY 20 WAS BREZHNEV'S
PRESENCE AT THE AIRPORT FOR ASSAD'S ARRIVAL, THE FIRST

SUCH BREZHNEV PERFORMANCE IN SEVERAL MONTHS. BREZHNEV LOOKED FIT AND FULL OF ENERGY AS HE PERSONALLY ESCORTED ASSAD THROUGH THE ARRIVAL CEREMONIES IN WINDY, BELOW-FREEZING WEATHER.

8. OTHER BREZHNEV APPEARANCES. BREZHNEV MADE TWO OTHER PUBLICIZED APPEARANCES DURING THE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 13. HE RECEIVED LIBYAN LEADER JALLUD ON FEBRUARY 15, AND APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD FORM DURING TV FILM OF THE EVENT. ON FEBRUARY 17 HE RECEIVED YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR SMOLE. ACCORDING TO THE YUGOSLAV EMBASSY, SMOLE FOUND BREZHNEV TO BE PERFORMING "VERY WELL", APPEARING "ENTIRELY NORMAL", AND SPEAKING "WELL" DURING THE FORTY-MINUTE MEETING.

9. OTHER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS. OFFICIAL COMMEMORATION OF SHCHERBITSKIY'S 60TH BIRTHDAY IN THE CENTRAL NEWS MEDIA SEEMED NO MORE THAN APPROPRIATE FOR A PARTY OFFICIAL OF SHCHERBITSKIY'S STANDING. IF HE IS PRESENTLY IN LINE FOR BIGGER THINGS, HIS OFFICIAL BIRTHDAY PRESENTS DID NOT REVEAL IT. FOR EXAMPLE:

--HE RECEIVED THE "ORDER OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION" RATHER THAN THE TRADITIONAL AND HIGHER "HERO OF SOCIALIST LABOR" AWARD, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE HE WAS GIVEN THE LATTER AWARD LAST FALL IN CONNECTION WITH THE SUCCESSFUL UKRAINIAN GRAIN HARVEST;

--HIS GREETINGS FROM THE LEADERSHIP BODIES CONTAINED THE STANDARD TWO PARAGRAPHS, IN CONTRAST TO THE THREE PARAGRAPHS ACCORDED KULAKOV ON HIS 60TH, AND DID NOT INCLUDE THE PHRASE "WE WISH YOU FROM ALL OUR HEARTS" ACCORDED KULAKOV;
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--IN FACT, THE WORDING OF THE GREETINGS TO SHCHERBITSKIY WAS IDENTICAL TO THAT ACCORDED CANDIDATE POLITBURO

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MASHEROV, WHOSE 60TH BIRTHDAY WAS FETED IN THE CENTRAL PRESS ON FEBRUARY 13; FULL POLITBURO MEMBER SHCHERBITSKIY WAS ACCORDED A BIT MORE SPACE ON PRAVDA'S FRONT PAGE THAN WAS THE LOWER-RANKING MASHEROV, BUT KULAKOV GOT SOMEWHAT MORE SPACE THAN DID SHCHERBITSKIY.

10. LENINGRAD PARTY CHIEF AND FULL POLITBURO MEMBER ROMANOV'S CURRENT TRIP TO VIETNAM MAY ENHANCE HIS IMAGE AS AN ALL-AROUND LEADER, BUT WE NOTE THAT HIS FEBRUARY 14 AIRPORT DEPARTURE FROM MOSCOW WAS ATTENDED ONLY BY CC SECRETARY RUSAKOV. IN CONTRAST, WHEN KAZAKH-STAN PARTY CHIEF AND FULL POLITBURO MEMBER KUNAYEV DEPARTED FOR NORTH KOREA JANUARY 16, HE WAS SEEN OFF BY FULL POLITBURO MEMBER PEL'SHE AS WELL AS BY RUSAKOV.

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11. THIS IS IR NO: 6 901 0183 78; 1. USSR; 2. 6 901 0183 78; 3. BREZHNEV RECEIVES THE ORDER OF VICTORY; 4. OMITTED; 5. 780221; 6. 780222; 7. 780222 MOSCOW; 8. ICR: T-2AX-38163/CONTINUES; 9. C-1; ARMA; 11. OMITTED;

12. LTCOLWILLIAM D. HALLORAN; 13. BG R.X.LARKIN;

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